

HIS messenger comth fro the kyng agayn,
And at the kynges moodres court he lighte;
And she was of this messenger ful fayn,
And plesed hym, in al that ever she myghte.
He drank, and wel his girdel underpighte;
He slepeth, and he snoreth in his gyse
Al nyghte, until the sonne gan aryse.

Eft were his lettres stolen everychon,
And countrefeted lettres in this wyse:
The king comandeth his constable anon,
Up peyne of hangyng, and on heigh juyse,
That he ne sholde suffren, in no wyse,
Custance inwith his reawme for tabyde
Thre dayes and o quarter of a tyde;

But in the same ship as he hire fond,
Hire and hir yonge sone, and al hir geere
He sholde putte, and croude hire fro the lond,
And chargen hire she never eft coome there!
O my Custance, wel may thy goost have feere
And slepyng in thy dream been in penance,
Whan Donegild cast al this ordinance.

This messenger on morwe, whan he wook,
Unto the castel halt the nexte way,
And to the constable he the lettre took;
And whan that he this pitous lettre say,
ful ofte he seyde, Allas! and weylaway!
Lord Crist, quod he, how may this world endure?
So ful of synne is many a creature!

O myghty God, if that it be thy wille,
Sith thou art rightful juge, how may it be
That thou wolt suffren innocents to spille,
And wikked folk regne in prosperitee?
O goode Custance, alas! so wo is me,
That I moot be thy tormentour or deye
On shames deeth; ther is noon oother weye.

WHEN bothe yonge & olde in al that place,
Whan that the kyng this cursed lettre
sente,
And Custance, with a deedly pale face,
The ferthe day toward the ship she wente;
But natheless she taketh in good entente
The wyl of Crist, and knelynge on the stronde,
She seyde, Lord! ay welcome be thy sonde!

He that me kepthe fro the false blame,
While I was on the lond amonges yow,
He kan me kepe from harm and eek fro shame
In salte see, although I se noght how.
As strong as evere he was, he is yet now.
In hym triste I, and in his mooder deere,
That is to me my seyl, and eek my steere.

Hir litel child lay wepyng in hir arm,
And knelynge, pitously to hym she seyde,
Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm.
With that hir kerchief of hir heed she breyde,
And over his litel eyen she it leyde,
And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
And into hevne hire eyen up she caste.

Mooder, quod she, and mayde bright, Marie,
Sooth is that thurgh wommanes eggement
Mankynde was lorn, and damned ay to dye,
for which thy child was on a croys yrent;
Thy blisful eyen sawe al his torment,
Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene
Thy wo and any wo man may sustene.

Thow sawe thy child yslayn bfore thyne eyen,
And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!
Now, lady bright, to whom alle woful cryen,
Thow glorie of wommanhede, thow faire may,
Thow haven of refut, brighte sterre of day,
Rewe on my child, that of thy gentillesse
Ruest on every reweful in distresse.

O litel child, alas! what is thy gilt,
That nevere wroghtest synne as yet, pardee?
Why wil thy hard fader han thee spilt?
O mercy, deere constable, quod she,
As lat my litel child dwelle heer with thee;
And if thou darst nat saven hym, for blame,
Yet kys hym ones in his fadres name!

THERWITH she looked bakward to the lond,
And seyde, farewel, housbonde routheles!
And up she rist, & walketh doun the stronde
Toward the ship, hir folweth al the prees,
And evere she preyeth hire child to hold his pees;
And taketh hir leve, and with an hooly entente,
She blisid hire and into ship she wente.

Vitaillid was the ship, it is no drede,
Habundantly for hire, ful longe space;
And othere necessities that sholde nede
She hadde ynogh, heryed be Goddes grace!
for wynd and weder, almyghty God purchace!
And brynge hire hoom, I kan no better seye;
But in the see she dryveth forth hir weye.

Explicit secunda pars. Sequitur pars tercia.

ALH the kyng comth hoom,
soon after this,
Unto his castel of the which
I tolde,
And asketh where his wyf
and his child is.
The constable gan aboute
his herte colde,
And pleyntly al the manere
he hym tolde,
As ye han herd, I kan telle it no bettere,
And sheweth the kyng his secle and eek his lettre;

And seyde, Lord, as ye comanded me,
Up peyne of deeth, so have I doon, certein.
This messenger tormented was til he
Moste biknowe, and tellen plat and pleynt,
fro nyght to nyght, in what place he had leyn;
And thus, by wit and subtil enquiryng,
Ymagined was by whom this harm gan spryng.

The hand was knowe that the lettre wroot,
And al the venym of this cursed dede;

But in what wise, certainly I noot.
Theeffect is this, that Alla, out of drede,
his mooder slow, that may men pleyntly rede,
for that she traitoure was to hire ligeance.
Thus endeth olde Donegild with meschance.

The sorwe that this Alla nyght and day
Maketh for his wyf, and for his child also,
Ther is no tonge that it telle may;
But now wol I unto Custance go,
That fleteth in the see, in peyne and wo
fye yer and moore, as liked Cristes sonde,
Er that hir ship approched unto londe.

UNDER an bethen castel, atte laste,
Of which the name in my text noght I
fynde,
Custance, and eek hir child, the see upcaste.
Almyghty God, that saved al mankynde,
Have on Custance and on hir child som mynde,
That fallen is in bethen hand eftsoone
In point to spille, as I shal telle yow soone.

Doun fro the castel comth ther many a wight,
To gauren on this ship, and on Custance;
But shortly, from the castel, on a nyght,
The lordes styward, God yewe him meschance!
A theef, that hadde reneyed oure creance,
Came into the ship alone, and seyde he sholde
hir lemman be, wherso she wolde or nolde.

Wo was this wretched womman tho bigon;
hir childe cride, and she cride pitously;
But blisful Marie heelp hire right anon,
for with hir struglyng wel and myghtily,
The theef fil overbord al sodeynly,
And in the see he dreynte for vengeance;
And thus hath Crist unwemmed kept Custance!

OFOLLE lust of luxurie, lo, thyn ende!
Nat oonly that thou feyntest mannes
mynde,
But verraily thou wolt his body shende.
Thende of thy werk, or of thy lustes blynde,
Is compleynyng: how many oon may men fynde
That noght for werk somtyme, but for thentente
To doon this synne, been outhir slayn or shente.

How may this wayke womman han this strengthe
Hire to defende agayn this renegat?
O Goliath, unmeasurable of lengthe,
how myghte David make thee so maat?
So yong and of armure so desolaat,
how dorste he looke upon thy dreadful face?
Wel may men seen, it nas but Goddes grace!

WHO yaf Judith corage or hardynesse
To sleen hym, Olofernes, in his tente,
And to deliveren out of wretchednesse
The peple of God? I seye for this entente,
That right as God spirit of vigour sente
To hem, and saved hem out of meschance,
So sente he myght and vigour to Custance.

FORTH gooth hir ship thurghout the narwe
mouth
Of Jubaltare and Septe, dryvyng ay,
Somtyme West and somtyme North and South,
And somtyme Est, ful many a wery day,
Til Cristes mooder, blessed be she ay!
Hath shapen, thurgh hir endeles goodnesse,
To make an ende of al hir hevynesse.

NOW lat us stynte of Custance but a throwe,
And speke we of the Romain emperour,
That out of Surrye hath by lettres knowe
The slaughtre of cristen folk, and dishonour
Doon to his doghter by a fals traytour,
I mene the cursed wikked sowdanesse,
That at the feeste leet sleen both moore and lesse;

for which this emperour hath sent anoon
his senatour with roial ordinance,
And othere lordes, God woot, many oon,
On Surryens to taken heigh vengeance.
They brennen, sleen, & bryng hem to meschance
ful many a day; but, shortly, this is thende,
Homward to Rome they shapen hem to wende.

This senatour repaireth with victorie
To Romeward, saillyng ful roially,
And mette the ship dryvyng, as seith the storie,
In which Custance sit ful pitously.
Nothyng ne knew he what she was, ne why
She was in swich array; ne she nyl seye
Of hire estaat, although she sholde deye.

He bryngeth hire to Rome, and to his wyf
He yaf hire, and hir yonge sone also;
And with the senatour she ladde hir lyf.
Thus kan oure lady bryngen out of wo
Woful Custance, and many another mo.
And longe tyme dwelled she in that place
In hooly werkes evere, as was hir grace.

The senatoures wyf hir aunte was,
But for al that she knew hire never the moore:
I wol no lenger tarien in this cas,
But to kyng Alla, which I spake of yore,
That wepeth for his wyf and siketh soore,
I wol retourne, and lete I wol Custance
Under the senatoures governance.

KYNG ALLA, which that hadde his mooder
slayn,
Upon a day fil in swich repentance,
That, if I shortly tellen shal and playn,
To Rome he comth, to receyven his penance,
And putte hym in the popes ordinance,
In heigh and logh; and Jhesu Crist bisoghte
foryeve his wikked werkes that he wroghte.

The fame anon thurghout the toun is born,
How Alla kyng shal come on pilgrymage,
By herbergeours that wenten hym biforn;
for which the senatour, as was usage,
Rood hym agayns, and many of his lynage,